

Relief from abnormal conditions in a bunker

Many players are unaware of the rules of golf regarding options for relief from a bunker full of water and with all the recent heavy rain, and predictions of a warm and wet autumn, it is a good time to clarify a player's options if their ball is in a bunker full of water. Common questions are; do I have to play the shot? Can I get free relief or is there a penalty? If relief is available? Where do I drop the ball? Do I drop the ball or can I place it?

Thankfully the rules of golf are clear on taking relief from water in the bunker (an abnormal course condition). Rule 16.1c states:

"If a player's ball is in a bunker and there is interference by an abnormal course condition on the course, the player may take either free relief under (1) or penalty relief under (2):

(1) Free Relief: Playing from Bunker. The player may take free relief under Rule 16.1b, except that:

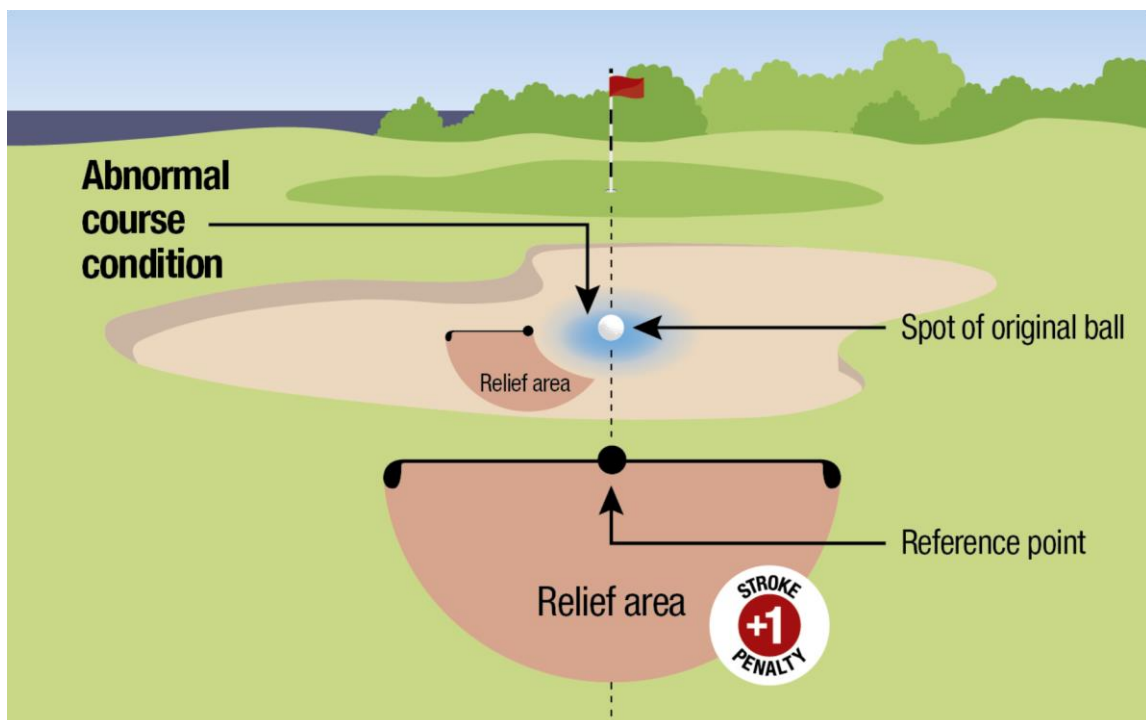
The nearest point of complete relief and the relief area must be in the bunker.

If there is no such nearest point of complete relief in the bunker, the player may still take this relief by using the point of *maximum available relief** in the bunker as the reference point.

In accordance with Rule 16.1b, the ball must be dropped.

(2) Penalty Relief: Playing from Outside Bunker (Back-On-the-Line Relief). For one penalty stroke, the player may drop the original ball or another ball (see Rule 14.3) in a relief area that is based on a reference line going straight back from the hole through the spot of the original ball.

The above rule is summarised in the diagram below:



The Committee may, from time to time, put in place a local rule to provide that a specific bunker or bunkers be classified as Ground Under Repair and classified in the general area. This will occur in extreme circumstances where specific bunkers are completely flooded prior to a competition commencing and there is no opportunity to take relief away from the abnormal condition, or where doing so would provide a significant advantage. If in place, the local rule will state that such bunkers will be identified by a stake, and for such bunkers, relief may be taken outside the bunker without penalty in accordance with Rule 16.1b.

**Definition of the point of maximum available relief*

The reference point for taking free relief from an abnormal course condition in a bunker (Rule 16.1c) when there is no nearest point of complete relief.

It is the estimated point where the ball would lie that is:

- Nearest to the ball's original spot, but no nearer to the hole,
- In the required area of the course, and
- Where that abnormal course condition least interferes with the stroke the player would have made from the original spot if the condition was not there.

Estimating this reference point requires the player to identify the choice of club, stance, swing and line of play the player would have used for that stroke.

The player does not need to simulate that stroke by taking an actual stance and swinging with the chosen club (but it is recommended that the player normally do this to help in making an accurate estimate).

The point of maximum available relief is found by comparing the relative amount of interference with the lie of the ball and the player's area of intended stance and swing and, on the putting green only, the line of play. For example, when taking relief from temporary water:

The point of maximum available relief may be where the ball will be in shallower water than where the player will stand (affecting the stance more than the lie and swing), or where the ball is in deeper water than where the player will stand (affecting the lie and swing more than the stance).